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The Religious Genesis of Conspiracy Theories and Their Consequences for Democracy and Religion: The Case of QAnon

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Abstract: Here, we will approach Conspiracy Theories (CTs) and, specifically, QAnon following the three traditional sociological fields of research. After an introduction in which we contextualise CDTs socially, culturally, economically and politically and in which we establish a conceptual map of what they mean, on the historical level (1), we will clarify their religious genesis, through the main analogies between them, magic and religion and their practices and rituals, as well as the conversion of conspiratorial agents into social agents of a religious nature. On the analytical side (2), we will deal with the QAnon belief system. Finally (3), from a critical perspective, we will describe the causes and harmful consequences of QAnon, both for religious sentiment itself and for democracy. We will conclude by pointing out that QAnon affects the coherence and stability of religious beliefs and democracy; in fact, it can be seen as libertarian authoritarianism and populism, advocating a sick freedom, the ultimate expression of the modern feeling of individual powerlessness and of a Modernity that has failed to deliver on its promises.

Keywords: sociology of religion; sociological theory; conspiracy theories; QAnon; democracy

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Citation: Roche Cárcel, Juan Antonio. 2023. The Religious Genesis of Conspiracy Theories and Their Consequences for Democracy and Religion: The Case of QAnon. *Religions* 14: 734. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060734

Academic Editors: Josetxo Beriain, Javier Gil-Gimeno and Celso Sánchez Capdequí

Received: 17 April 2023
Revised: 24 May 2023
Accepted: 25 May 2023
Published: 1 June 2023

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Socio-Cultural-Economic and Political Context in Which Conspiracy Theories Emerge

Conspiracy theories (CTs) have been present since the earliest civilisations throughout history (Gallo 2020), especially during traumatic events for society (Hernáiz 2021). Nowadays, many social scientists recognise that there is a general social crisis, which could be defined as a major turbulence or disturbance of the social system, originating from external or internal causes (Thom 1979) and producing a breakdown of the legitimacy of the value system (Béjin 1979). This collapse leads to a collective situation characterised by a series of contradictions and ruptures, full of conflicts, tensions and disagreements (Freund 1979). It is precisely in this state that CTs are embedded.

This is true at least since religious freedom has become a human right, as in modern societies, there are different ways of adhering or not to a certain religion, which will lead to the development of secularisation and the former violent "wars of religion" will give way to "culture wars" (Ibargüen et al. 2022). These wars are centred on political struggles originating in value-linked polemics (Fouz 2014), as in the case of CTs.

The latter also emerge in the context of the institutionalisation of the society of individualisation, a culmination of the process of modernisation that has transformed individuals into lost, liquid, precarious, indeterminate and at-risk subjects (Dewey 1999; Beck 1992, 2012, 2017; Beck and Beck 2016; Lash 2004; Bauman 2005, 2011, 2013). It is precisely in this society of individualisation that 'existential anomie' and 'anomie of democracy' emerge, which CTs attempt to compensate for (Barkun 2013; Douglas et al. 2019; Hidalgo 2022). Thus, anomie, which has progressively invaded the world since the end of the nineteenth century and which is one of the features of CTs, is the fruit of a mental illness, paranoia, with a psychiatric and social, individual and collective character, which affects society and democracy (Boltanski 2014).

Clearly, the proliferation of CTs is also helped by the development of industrialisation and the free market, which is prone to stratagems and conspiracies (Smith 1982) and is also connected to the crisis of the Republic and its values (Arendt 1972), and thus to the crisis of democracy and its conception. Thus, crisis constitutes the normal condition of democracy (Bauman and Bordoni 2014), insofar as it lacks a foundation and is built on shifting sands. In fact, it creates a "labyrinth" of antinomies and contradictions (Flores 2013), is the prototype of the plurality of values, of doubt and skepticism, and expresses, socially and institutionally, the permanent doubt of citizens (Hidalgo 2022). This goes hand in hand with the absence of apodictic, fixed and universal rules (Orrú 1983) and the loss of social homogeneity and solidarity. Therefore, the crisis of democracy is based on a vacuum, reinforced by the crisis itself.

Since the Second World War, Western democracies entered a period of progressive stability, but after the oil problems of 1973 and the correlative institutionalisation of the economic "Age of Uncertainty" (Galbraith 1977), successive crises have occurred, especially in recent years. They have led to the questioning of representative democracy (Held 2006), of the very idea of the state and of what is known as the European model of the liberal-social state under the rule of law (Bobbio et al. 1985). As the latter is based on security and socio-economic equality, when these values enter into crisis, social democracy has lost legitimacy, on the left because it is considered that politics has been dwarfed by the powerful economy and on the right because it is understood that the state is overburdened (Requejo 1990).

In the USA, over the last three centuries, CTs have been an integral part of the culture, four of which stand out: the Puritan on witchcraft in the late 17th century; the Catholic in the early to mid-19th century; the pre-war on slavery; and the communist in the 1950s (Butter 2013; Moore 2018). Already in the 1920s, society is in conflict with itself (Dewey 1999), but it is especially from the beginning of the Cold War onwards that there is an explosion of CTs largely as a consequence of anxiety and loss of control over mass culture (Adorno et al. 1950), suspicion of traditional authorities and physical and psychological insecurity at the time (Boltanski 2014; Gallo 2019). The 1990s and beyond saw the growth of CTs at a time of tension, when discord spreads socially (Lamo et al. 1994) and in the context of a nation more imagined than real, turned into a great collective dream (Baudrillard 1994, 2010), into a 'fantasyland' in which it is increasingly difficult to disentangle reality, fallacy and fantasy (Andersen 2018). Thus, in this culture of spectacle, when problems seem unsolvable and those in charge are incapable of solving them, CTs compensate for this situation—just as populisms do—with very intense, immediate and constant information that creates the illusion of participation (García-Canclini 2001).

It is no coincidence that mass communication technologies have been fundamental to the implementation, development, dissemination and even viralisation of CTs (D'Ancona 2019; Berghel 2022). True, social networks have managed to become so generalised and widespread that the current American cultural atmosphere is surrounded by conspiracies (Gallo 2019), as if they were a real "epidemic" (Boltanski 2014).

In this general socio-cultural, economic and political context, and associated with them, we should add the numerous analogies with magic and religion, authentic roots and indispensable sources for their understanding, even in a time that has been defined, until recently, as secular by European sociology. Yet, North American sociology has shown that ascetic Protestantism argued that the action generated by the religious impulse was indeed secular, but that it sought to establish the kingdom of God on earth (Turner 2005). Hence, although religion was apparently relegated to the private sphere in secular society, the modernisation that culminated in the late eighteenth century did not lead to the destruction of its influence, but to the development of new types of religiosities and 'modern civil religions' (Bellah 1970; Parsons 1974). Consequently, in Modernity, "nothing is lost forever", as previous stages are preserved and reorganised, under new conditions (Bellah 2017).

1.2. Conspiracy Theories in Sociology Theoretical and Methodological Bases, the Research Question, the Starting Hypothesis and the Objectives

CTs are embedded in the socio-cultural-economic, and political and religious context just described and are, therefore, very appropriate for the groups and individuals who are part of them to try to historically understand the social phenomena alluded to (Popper 1966). In fact, they constitute a social and cultural theory (Bell and Bennion-Nixon 2001); they are a "cultural phenomenon" (Räikkä 2009), cognitive constructions that compete with other forms of cognitive construction such as, for example—as will be seen—magic and religion and common sense and science, particularly the Social Sciences (Hernáiz 2021).

Max Weber's comprehensive sociology and the hermeneutic method are very useful for the historical understanding of social phenomena. The first key reference for our work—Weberian comprehensive or interpretative sociology (Weber 1962; González García 1992, 1998), according to which both the social world and the relationships that it generates are meaningful—was chosen in the hope that, through "correspondence in meaning" or "elective affinities," we might identify the common links between the different cognitive dimensions—aesthetic, ethical, economic, political, religious and social—that modernity has fragmented (López 2001) and, more specifically, correspondences of meaning existing between conspiracy theories and the socio-cultural context which produces them.

The aforementioned Weberian sociological theory is complemented with one methodology: the "heuristic or interpretive method" originated in hermeneutics and has proved to be a highly useful science for comprehensive Sociology, insofar as interpretation arises as its main problem (Ricoeur 2008). It is indeed based on a philosophical reflection—which has a sociological scope, in our view—about the comprehension experience, as well as on the axial role that the interpretation of humans' behaviour plays in their relationship with the world; in fact, what social hermeneutics interprets is the things themselves—albeit seen in their own context. The aim sought more accurately consists of finding the deep keys of CTs, or expressed differently, in revealing their inner sense from the external speech or ideological discourse (Grondin 2014). Hence, this is why its object is not language, but a text—an image, we might add—which never has an autonomous nature, as it is contextualized (Beltrán Villalba 2016), this contextualization precisely constituting the key for a sociologist.

In addition to comprehensive Sociology, the Sociology, in the last 50 years, has tried to free itself, in successive attempts, from "the curse of K. Popper" and his *Open Society and its enemies* (Boltanski 2014), a pioneering and key book for understanding the phenomenon of CTs. In any case, from Sociology, there have been two main currents of research on them: the one that contrasts realism and symbolism, and the one that contrasts a cultural aspect and a classical one. The first defines conspiracy theories as political pathologies, which are shaped by a paranoid and value-based perspective that irreparably leads to the distortion of reality and, through it, to discrimination, fanaticism and, frequently, violence. The second perspective does not consider CTs to be pathological, neither cognitively nor normatively; on the contrary, it understands them as proposing reasonable explanations for the circumstances in which they occur or for the events and processes that take place in them (Reche and Nefes 2022). Thus, the views of K. Popper and the two positions I have just quoted will be very present in this work.

From another perspective, CTs have also been approached from at least three sociological research fields: the historical, the analytical and the critical (Gallo 2019). The historical field has focused on describing the evolutionary process of CTs in an attempt to understand how they came to be what they are today (Beltrán 1985). The analytical approach has attempted to examine in detail the social phenomenon that is the object of this research, with the aim of delimiting its main features, as well as the fundamental parts of which it consists or the existing connections between all its components. Finally, the critic has sought to uncover the social, cultural and political consequences and, in particular, how they affect the legitimacy of democracy (Douglas et al. 2019). So, after an introduction in which we contextualise socially, culturally, economically and politically, and in which

we establish a possible conceptual map of what CTs mean, here we will follow these three possible approaches. On the historical level, we will attempt to clarify the religious genesis of contemporary CTs, drawing out the main analogies between them, magic and religion and their practices and rituals, as well as how conspiratorial agents inherit old religious social types. On the analytical side, on the other hand, we will address the case of QAnon within CTs and how it forms a belief system. Finally, from a critical perspective, we will try to address the causes and the harmful social and political consequences of CTs (Douglas et al. 2019), particularly of QAnon, both for religious sentiment itself and for democracy, something that has been extensively researched by sociology in the last decade.

On the other hand, the three sociological approaches are based on a basic research question, a starting hypothesis and objectives. Regarding the research question, the aim is to find out what the real scope of CTs are in society itself and how it affects sociology insofar as this discipline has it as an object of its research: Do CTs constitute a cultural theory produced by a paranoid society that leads the sociological discipline to be paranoid as well?

In relation to the starting hypothesis, we consider here that CTs are a cultural war based on values that replace the old wars of religion.

In this sense, in order to answer this research question and confirm the initial hypothesis, we have set the following objectives:

1. To clarify the historical religious genesis of contemporary CTs, establishing the main analogies between them, magic and religion and their practices and rituals, as well as the way in which conspiratorial agents inherit old religious social types.
2. Analyse the belief system that makes up the North American QAnon movement and its CTs.
3. To critically evaluate the causes and harmful social and political consequences of QAnon's CTs, both for religious sentiment itself and for democracy.

1.3. On the Concept of CTs: A Cognitive Conceptual Map

When asked the question of what a CT is, we must first point out the different denominations used by experts, for example, terms such as "conspiracy thinking", "conspiracy mentality", "positions predisposed to conspiracy", "conspiracy ideation", "conspiracy ideology", "conspiracy mentality" and "conspiracy worldview" (Douglas et al. 2019). In our case, instead of proposing a definition that swells the number of existing ones, we will establish a cognitive conceptual map that delineates the main features of the phenomenon (Jameson 1992, 1995). To this end, we will focus on the seven characteristics that social scientists consider basic.

1 The first salient feature of CTs is their approach to reality and history. In this sense, since the beginning of the 21st century, they have evolved from the "pathological" to the "logical", i.e., they have been transformed into a way of interpreting reality and history (Gallo 2019). Their strategy consists of emphasising the "little reality of reality" in a "shifting and unstable" (Guénon 2021), "distrustful" era, in which reality is dissolved and confused with its representation, obtained through manipulations that give rise to diverse interpretations. At the same time, they focus on a superficial, apparent but illusory reality, which they oppose to a deeper, hidden, threatening and informal one, which they consider much more real. In this context, for CTs, the whole of reality becomes a "vast plot", so it should come as no surprise that they end up generating an uneasiness about the solidity and stability of reality (Boltanski 2014).

As for the way in which CTs observe History, in a time when its representation is diverse and multiple (Koselleck 2016), it is called into question. Thus, it is devalued in a peculiar way, insofar as CTs constantly look for the history "behind History" (Furedi 2005; Popper 1966).

2 Another feature in relation to the questioning of reality and history is the problematisation of the seat of power (Boltanski 2014). Thus, CTs construct notions of power as crucial and, above all, emphasise its legitimacy (Arendt 1972), who has it and how it is

used (Jones 2023): normally, CTs consider—like populism—that there are intruders who corrupt the system (Zizek 2020) and that power as a whole is corrupt. Moreover, in them, there is always a group or a person conspiring, i.e., doing something from the shadows (Hernáiz 2011), executing a direct and intentional plan (Popper 1948; Boltanski 2014) and designing an absolute collusion (Gallo 2019) and secret plot (Pigden 1995; Knight 2003; Hernáiz 2009; Barkun 2013; Boltanski 2014; Douglas et al. 2019; Douglas 2021; Cunningham and Everton 2022) or hidden plot (Gallo 2019).

3 As a consequence of the above, this "plot has replaced the tragic notion of destiny" (Piglia 2006), that is, of fate given meta-socially—God, Nature—by being socially produced (Beriain 2000) but turned into an illusion (Sen 2007). However, sacred remnants of the old conceptualisation of destiny still survive, since, for CTs, the destiny of individuals is beyond their control, in the hands of paranormal or malicious powers (Adorno 1976; Pickel et al. 2022). This means that there are hidden forces that manage our destiny, behind the curtains or backstage (Pickel et al. 2022) of the world stage (Popper 1966).

Behind this plan, there is also the explanation of the events—wars, poverty, unemployment, misery, inequality, epidemics . . . —that dismay people who believe in CTs, as well as a hidden agenda: usurping political or economic power, violating rights, violating established agreements, concealing vital secrets or altering fundamental institutions (Douglas et al. 2019; Gallo 2019).

4 CTs establish a direct relationship between cause and effect, understanding cause as the precise agency or intentionality of the person or group that conspires (Hernáiz 2021). In relation to this, causality defines CTs in that they conceive of neither chance, random, accident nor unexpected consequences of action (Sacks 1992; Locke 2009; Hernáiz 2011; Butter 2013; Boltanski 2014; Gallo 2019).

5 CTs offer closed and self-confirming discourses, which are considered infallible and unlimited in time and space, i.e., universal (Popper 1948; Hernáiz 2009). Yet, these discourses are characterised by fallibility and limitation in space and time (Gallo 2019) and, for this reason, CTs cannot be considered scientific, i.e., they cannot be falsifiable, testable by trial and error, in addition to which, in science, all necessary terms must be undefined (Popper 1966). Therefore, CTs are marked by "scientificity", by pseudo-scientific hypotheses, which—as we will see in this paper—connects them to contemporary totalitarian thought (Adorno et al. 1950; Arendt 2005).

6 CTs constitute—as in populism—(Todorov 2014) a "dramatically simple" (Arendt 2005), cryptic (Cunningham and Everton 2022; Zihiri et al. 2022) and false explanation (Cunningham and Everton 2022; Zihiri et al. 2022). In that sense, they are indifferent to facts; they use lies, "the great lies of our time" (Berghel 2022, p. 99), which function as if they were truth (Broncano 2019). This happens because "once truth has been devoured in Modernity, people swallow all lies" (Fernández-Armesto 1999, p. 177) and because conspirators do not really care about it (Tangherlini et al. 2020), because they use false narratives (Berghel 2022) and, in short, because they are associated with post-truth and denialism (D'Ancona 2019), which denies techno-scientific rationality (Beck 2001).

7 All CTs relieve their supporters and social leaders of responsibility, which links them to historicist metaphysics—another feature of authoritarianism—that allows humans to be relieved of the burden of their responsibilities (Popper 1966; Pickel et al. 2022). In contrast, CTs not only relieve their members of responsibility, but divert it onto the groups they blame for human misfortunes. Moreover, they are intolerant and exacerbate the sense of others, because of their identity crisis (Augé 1998).

2. The Historical-Religious Genesis of CTs

2.1. CTs, Secular Substitutes for Religion

To these basic characteristics of CTs, and associated with them, we should add the numerous analogies with magic and religion, authentic roots and indispensable sources for their understanding, even in a time that has been defined, until recently, as secular by European sociology. Yet, North American sociology has shown that ascetic Protestantism

argued that the action generated by the religious impulse was indeed secular, but that it sought to establish the kingdom of God on earth (Turner 2005). Hence, although religion was apparently relegated to the private sphere in secular society, the modernisation that culminated in the late eighteenth century did not lead to the destruction of its influence, but to the development of new types of religiosities and 'modern civil religions' (Bellah 1970; Parsons 1974). Consequently, in Modernity, "nothing is lost forever", as previous stages are preserved and reorganised, under new conditions (Bellah 2017).

This would explain why civilisation today is currently in "transition" between "tribal or closed society", with its subjection to magical forces, and the "open society", which sets free the critical faculties of the human being through which individuals adopt personal positions (Popper 1966). Consequently, modern ways of thinking, although formulated in an abstract and universalistic spirit that would invest them with a disenchanted aspect (Locke 2009), are still imbued with a magical-charismatic/moral character (Whitehead 1974).

In addition, instrumentally rationalised modernisation, with its logic of worldly reasoning, produces instability, risk and anxiety (Douglas et al. 2019), elements that end up undermining, from within, modernisation itself and allow new compensatory religious feelings to emerge. Hence, 'disenchanted worldviews' coexist with 're-enchanted' ones, and thus the modern idea that reality is in principle fully knowable does not produce a single definitive version, but multiple competing ones, i.e., competing accounts of error, anomalies, speculative explanations and other 'mysterious' phenomena (Locke 2009), which are precisely the ones behind CTs (Butter 2013).

In short, it should come as no surprise that, in CTs, past forms coexist with those of the present, and that vestiges of our ancestors' ways of understanding conspiracy remain. Moreover, they can be understood as a continuation of religious modes of thought—and emotion—and thus as a (secular) substitute for religion itself.

2.2. Main Analogies between Magic, Religion and CTs

Magic has been widely discussed by the founding fathers of anthropology and sociology, such as James Frazer, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, Marcel Mauss, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Historians of religion such as Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade have also dealt with religion (Citro 2003). However, this has given rise to a plurality of approaches that point to the complexity of its meaning and function, as well as the difficulty of defining it. Nevertheless, in this article, we will try to synthesise some of its characteristics and its deep connection with religion, which will be very useful for the understanding of CTs and QAnon.

Magic constituted the origin of sacred rites, although with the passage of time, religious evolution took on more refined characters, without these rites ever completely abandoning their magical origin and magic, its ambivalent, deadly and beneficent character (Eliade 2014). Thus, as R. Otto points out, in religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism), magic still exists, with the aim of manipulating the object of worship (God) through certain procedures (prayers, chants, etc.) and seeking intervention for or against in certain situations (Otto 2021). Indeed, magic, which superimposes itself on matter, investing people and objects with a sacred power (Eliade 2014), involves the application of beliefs, rituals or actions used with the conviction that they can manipulate natural or supernatural beings and forces (Hutton 2017; Agustí Torres n.d.), forces that circulate everywhere in the cosmos, but which manifest themselves in extraordinary phenomena, as well as in strong personalities (Eliade 1993); that is, magic represents a means to control phenomena. Therefore, the religious is a way of controlling phenomena through magic (Frazer and Frazer 1922), which implies, in short, that it is always accompanied by religion (Eliade 1993), that there is a continuity between the two (Cassirer 2006).

Moreover, magical thinking, or superstitious thinking, argues that unrelated events are nevertheless causally connected, particularly as a result of supernatural—divine or demonic—effects (Eliade 2014), even though there is no plausible causal link between

them. Not for nothing is the causality of events to be found in that ethereal imaginary terrain situated between religious ritual, prayer, sacrifice, the observance of a taboo and the expectation of a benefit or reward. Thus, it could be said that "Magical thinking is a type of fallacious thinking and is a common source of invalid causal inferences" (Agustí Torres n.d.). Not surprisingly, magic is a "collective representation" and offers a "mystique of participation" (Lévy-Bruhl and Clare 2010) and has been linked to "associative thinking" (Glucklich 1997), defined as pre-logical, while the "madness of the magician" confuses an imaginary connection with a real one. Moreover, it is that the magician, supreme being or person (Eliade 2014), believes that thematically linked elements can influence each other by virtue of their similarity (Evans-Pritchard 1977) or in contagious and sympathetic—or sympathetic—magic, based on the law of contact or contagion and operating on the premise that 'like affects like'. Furthermore, by virtue of magic, some people think that the whole world functions according to these mimetic or homeopathic principles (Frazer and Frazer 1922).

These characteristics of magic are still present in the modern world, as it continues to play an important religious, healing and medicinal role in many cultures today (Baglari 2015; Agustí Torres n.d.) and, in general, in our own mundane intellectual activity (Shweder 1977). Within Western culture, magic has been linked to ideas of the primitive (Davies 2012) and the non-modern (Styers 2004) and, moreover, is associated with the other (Graham 2018) and the foreign (Bailey 2018), while also constituting "a powerful marker of cultural difference" (Styers 2004, p. 14).

Magic is an occult science (Eliade 2014), a private, secret, mysterious rite, which ultimately tends towards the forbidden (Mauss et al. 2007) and which is theoretically opposed to religion, an organised, institutionalised cult (Hanegraaff 2012). Émile Durkheim—who inherits the ideas of M. Mauss—considers that magic, like religion, constitutes "sacred things, that is, things set apart and forbidden" (Cunningham 1999, p. 44), although they are different in their social organisation. Besides, magic, and the magician, are inherently anti-social, for "There is no Church in magic" (Hanegraaff 2012, p. 165); it is that magic "does not result in uniting those who adhere to it, nor in uniting them into a group that leads a common life" (Cunningham 1999, p. 44).

However, this view of Mauss and Durkheim is problematic and, in relation to CTs and QAnon, is not appropriate, since these form a social and cultural phenomenon of the first magnitude, as will be seen. In this respect, Max Weber does not separate magic so sharply from religion and breaks with the perspective of his time, which understood only historical institutional religion as exercising dominion over human acts. In fact, he includes magical processes in the systems of life regulation (magic, religion), as forms that also give meaning to actions (Martínez 2006). In Weber's words, "action whose motivation is religious or magical appears in its primitive existence oriented towards this world" (Weber 1968, p. 328).

In short, magic is a secret activity, a private and forbidden—not legal—rite. It is ambivalent—beneficial and harmful—superstitious, associated with contagion and belief in the supernatural—divine or demonic. It possesses associative, pre-logical thinking, does not establish plausible causal links between events, is located in a fallacious imaginary terrain and believes that the whole world functions mimetically. It is a collective representation, seeks intervention in certain situations, attempts to control phenomena, offers mystical participation, focuses on worldly intellectual activity, orients action towards this world and has a healing character. It is associated with the other, the foreigner, and becomes a process that marks difference. It always goes hand in hand with religion.

CTs take on these characteristics and indeed, CTs have certain analogies with magic and religion. With magic, because they constitute a secularised magical thinking (Popper 1966; Hernáiz 2009; Hernáiz 2021), with its "superstitious" modern forms (Pigden 1995; Pickel et al. 2022), the result of "the secularisation of a religious superstition" (Popper 1966, p. 310).

Accordingly, it is possible to point to several formal aspects that link the characteristics of conspiratorial thinking to traditional magical ones. This is the case, for example, of the use of analogy, the emphasis on causality, the reference to what is 'hidden', the value of tradition, of 'participation', of 'feeling the deep' and even of scientism (Parmigiani 2021), to which we alluded earlier. In effect, CTs—like magical thinking—do not like the emptiness of the absence of explanation and, in the same way, do not tolerate chance or the unexpected consequences of action (Hernáiz 2021). Thus, the conspirator supplants chance by absence (Hernáiz 2009) and seeks to discover the causes, which he considers real but hidden, of the problems that affect him (Boltanski 2014).

It is worth bearing in mind, on the other hand, that in the democratic state, CTs assume the same or similar functions as religion, as they generate resources for the control of uncertainty, for the search for certainty and knowledge, for the reduction of complexity, for the construction of collective identity, for moral authority and for normative legitimacy (Hidalgo 2022; Pickel et al. 2022).

Among the analogies between religion and CTs, 'belief' stands out above all others as a fundamental element common to both (Locke 2009; Barkun 2013; Douglas et al. 2019; Broncano 2019; Reche and Nefes 2022; Hidalgo 2022); hence, believers in CTs possess a 'quasi-religious' mentality (Douglas et al. 2019) in which millenarian accents or an apocalyptic worldview are not lacking (Gallo 2019).

Millenarianism, which derives from Jewish and Christian beliefs, believes in an imminent change that will result in the perfection of human existence (Barkun 2013). This is because the millennialist is concerned with the creation of a perfect society that will transform the world and establish a utopian kingdom on earth, usually for a specific period of time before the end of the world or the end of a particular era of linear history (Berger 2015). Within millenarianism, it is possible to distinguish two main tendencies: the progressive and the catastrophist. Both advocate that there is a divine plan to establish an imminently approaching millennial kingdom and push for an active role for believers, in the sense that the coming of the new world can be achieved through the solitary efforts of the divine or, together, through the work of believers. However, they differ in one essential respect. While the progressive views human nature optimistically and argues that changes can occur in a non-catastrophic and progressive way to create the millennial kingdom, the catastrophist views human nature pessimistically. He sees humanity and society as corrupt, which means that the world must be completely destroyed to make way for a new one (Wessinger 1997).

Apocalypse, for its part, is a central concept in millenarianism. Belief in the apocalypse and the probable or imminent destruction of the world (or a general global catastrophe), usually associated with an upheaval in the social, political and religious order of human society, although traditionally seen as part of a divine scheme, frequently appears today in secular contexts, without reference to anything divine, as in, for example, literature, television and film, video games, graphic novels, music, etc. The believers of CTs are also "preoccupied with the imminent end or complete and radical change of the world, and its signs and portents" (Crossley 2021, p. 94). For them, the Apocalypse constitutes an approaching transformation, confrontation or cataclysmic event of momentous proportions, which is only noticed by a select few individuals. Moreover, they see this event as a battle between good (the in-group) and evil (the out-group), which often lies behind their justification of violence against members of the out-group (Adorno 1976; Berger 2015; Douglas 2021; Jones 2023).

In short, millenarian worldviews understand the world in terms of a struggle between good and evil and believe that this polarisation will continue until the coming of the Apocalypse, with evil finally defeated. In this, there is a difference with CTs, for while the latter, like millenarian worldviews, impose a dualistic worldview and locate and describe evil, they do not guarantee that good will triumph over evil, as millenarianism does (Jones 2023). On the other hand, the two 'faith systems'—millenarianism and CTs—are similar in that they embark on a moral crusade to solve the ills of society, in that they con-

stitute a secularised response to the religious problem of Theodicy (Reche and Nefes 2022). Thus, if according to M. Weber (1968), the latter entailed a rational and ordering character of religious beliefs, an attempt to explain evil in relation to the existence of an omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent God, CTs normally function as socially legitimised explanations of evil in the post-secular context. That is, they understand that all evil must be known, so they try to explain that evil to society, thus forming a "secular theodicy" or "sociodicy" (Hernáiz 2021), a social justification of evil and of society itself, considered as imperfect and unjust (Giner 2015).

Another important analogy between CTs and religion is the idea of the existence of a culprit, for they need someone, an agent of the conspiracy on whom to focus the responsibility for what happened and on whom to incarnate the cause of the disaster (Douglas et al. 2019). In this sense, advocates of CTs demand—like (San Agustín 2022)—that the wrongdoer, the culprit, be punished (Tilly 2008). Indeed, the growth of conspiracy culture may be associated with an emerging discourse of guilt, linked to suffering (Groh 1987) central to the Christian experience (Mannheim 1943; Scheler 1974; Feuerbach 2008), which seeks culprits, perpetrators and 'scapegoats' (Locke 2009).

This explains, in part, why they generate prejudices towards particular groups—Jews, Muslims, Africans, LGTBI, Indians, for example—(Jones 2023) or display radical anti-government attitudes (Douglas et al. 2019). Moreover, these prejudices are characteristic of a type of mentality beyond empiricism, in as much as CTs interpret the world, the objects and phenomena that exist in it from a religious-metaphysical point of view and not according to the methodological standards of modern sciences; moreover, for conspiracy theorists, the results of science are part of the conspiracy, as are all those individuals or groups, including the media, who claim to refute a conspiracy with arguments (Bartlett and Miller 2010; Cunningham and Everton 2022).

Another profound analogy of CTs with religion is that both concern the individual or the collectivity (Hidalgo 2022). True, (secular) religions and CTs promise atomised individuals' meanings (Räikkä 2009) and orient them intellectually (Douglas et al. 2019) through a holistic cognitive style, which focuses—like populism—on totalitarian metaphors (Villacañas 2015), on general images and connections between elements, rather than offering singular details; that is, they propose a cognitive explanation of how the world and human coexistence can be understood. Yet, religions and CTs do not only promise an individual orientation, but they also construct a collective identity (Boltanski 2014), based on nationalities, political parties and religious groups (Douglas et al. 2019). Indeed, due to their marginal character—we will dwell on this in chapter 4.2—they strengthen their communal ties (Sennett 2017) and differentiate—like populism—between 'us' and 'them', between friends and enemies (Zizek 2020) and between 'believers' and 'non-believers'. Simultaneously, they distinguish their group, which they define as "positive", from another group, conceived as "negative" (Douglas 2021) and even as "demonic" (Bartlett and Miller 2010).

No wonder, in short, that members of CTs belong to a 'religion' and—like it—are historically linked to prejudice, witch-hunts, revolutions and genocide (Douglas et al. 2019).

CTs and religion also focus on individual or collective powerlessness (Douglas et al. 2019), by considering that "politics is powerless", as it alone cannot decisively alter economic (Popper 1966) or other realities, and by expressing a deep distrust of democratic institutions, as we will see below. Paradoxically, however, CTs can provide a possible way out of this impotence, insofar as, in a certain sense, they serve as a factor of a personal political, social and altruistic commitment to the community. In this respect, it is not without reason that they call for political activity and inspire collective action and attempts at social change, particularly when threatening events occur (Hidalgo 2022). However, on occasion—QAnon would be an example of this, as will be discussed in due course—they may advocate violence as an acceptable way of expressing disagreement with the government or the political situation (Bartlett and Miller 2010; Douglas et al. 2019).

Finally, CTs—like religion—address people's emotional needs, helping them to manage fears and insecurities, providing emotional support and offering epistemological and

ontological certainties during social crises or under conditions of uncertainty (Van Prooijen and Douglas 2017; Douglas et al. 2019; Pickel et al. 2022). Moreover, CTs constitute an expected, and even 'normal', response to conditions of social instability (Locke 2009) and 'dramatise the uncertainty' inherent in a maladjusted social, cultural and political order (Boltanski 2014).

2.3. Conspiratorial Agents Inherit Ancient Religious Ideal Types: The Conspirator Is a God, a Magician, the Devil, a Sorcerer, a Charismatic Leader and a Sociologist?

The links between magic, religion and CTs do not end with the multiple analogies just described, for they also extend to the consideration that members of these theories give to conspiratorial agents. In fact, according to K. Popper (1972), an unintended consequence of the secularisation of beliefs is that CTs represent the role that gods once played in social life. Thus, although Greco-Latin divinities have disappeared, they have been replaced by mysterious and very powerful, almost divine humans or groups (Gallo 2019); hence, conspiracies identify a responsible and intentional agent (Boltanski 2014), with quasi-infinite and all-powerful powers and attributions (Gallo 2019) or with supernatural, paranormal (Pickel et al. 2022), exceptional or extraordinary powers (Cunningham and Everton 2022): that is, a god, a demon, a magician, a charismatic leader and, in short, a great conspirator, capable of producing such a grandiose result (Hernáiz 2011; Hernáiz 2021).

For the magical mentality, the negative or harmful event is explained by the existence of an agent that can be identified or purged through the rite (Hernáiz 2021). Yet, the secrecy and the ability to hide the traces of their action constitute the clear proof that the sorcerer, like the conspirator of CTs, is at large in the world (Hernáiz 2009).

Sometimes he can be compared, because of his cunning, to a demon (Lotman 2008), as nothing escapes him and there is no ambiguity or ambivalence in his actions, nor is there any sign of randomness (Hernáiz 2021).

The conspirator also possesses an elective affinity; he identifies himself, with the charismatic leader, because—like him—he makes powerful use of central politics as an indispensable tool (Hernáiz 2011). However, it is a leader who—in the same way as in populism—(Zizek 2020) represents the whole group and requires a theatre, a pulpit, a balcony, a square, a stage (Villacañas 2015) or social networks on the internet.

Finally, according to some sociologists, who open an interesting and unfinished debate, the conspiratorial agent resembles the social scientist in general, and the sociologist in particular. In this respect, K. Popper points out that CTs are a "theory held by many rationalists" and argues that they constitute "exactly the opposite of the true purpose of the social sciences" (Popper 1966, p. 309 ff), insofar as they seek impersonal and structural causes (Hernáiz 2021). However, contradictorily, he also maintains that most of contemporary sociology amounts to a "conspiracy theory of society" (Moore 2018, p. 8). Certainly, there are parallels between CTs and sociological explanations, as they both spring from the same cultural sources (Locke 2009) and from the same questioning of reality. Thus, sociology—just as CTs do—also problematises and tests the reality of reality, or rather, questions the apparent reality, by trying to reach a reality that would be more hidden, deeper and more real. This reality, moreover, is presented—as in the case of CTs—full of enigmas and plots that sociology tries to solve (Boltanski 2014).

On the other hand, scientists in general, and sociologists in particular—as in myth (Blumenberg 2004)—have developed explanations of the intrusion of chaos into order and have stood as guarantors of the defence of that order. In the same way, CTs pursue certainty and the defence of order, that is, they defend society against chaos and use technology to achieve this goal (Hernáiz 2021). In fact, conspiratorial constructions present an ordered and directed world (Gallo 2019) and hence their profound and disturbing sociological nature.

3. The Analytical Dimension of QAnon's Religiosity

3.1. The QAnon Religious Movement, a New Syncretic Religion

The QAnon movement stems from an offshoot of the *Pizzagate* conspiracy theory, which implicated high-ranking US officials and restaurants in a network of human trafficking and child sex trafficking. It was the ideological motive behind the 2016 shooting at *Comet Ping Pong*, a Washington D. C. pizzeria (Cosentino 2020), where a North Carolina man entered and indiscriminately shot innocent people (Martineau 2017; Tangherlini et al. 2020; Cunningham and Everton 2022). Since 2021, supporters of this movement have increased (Huff 2022; Dinulescu 2022) to the point that, in 2022, according to studies published by the Public Religion Research Institute in Washington, on 24 February 2022, approximately 41 million people, 16% of the adult population, were "QAnon believers" (Jenkins 2022; Dinulescu 2022). Therefore, from our perspective, we believe it is justified to exemplify this movement as an important CT.

From North America, QAnon has spread globally (Zihiri et al. 2022), reaching countries such as Canada, Australia and the European Union (Jones 2023). Spain also has followers, whose main dissemination channel is Rafapal[1], on Youtube, as well as political personalities from the Vox party[2]. In any case, we will focus here on the American QAnon.

QAnon constitutes "a belief system" (Cunningham and Everton 2022; Valente 1995), a "complex cultural symptom" (Moore 2018, p. 5), a "complex web of mythology, conspiracy theories, personal interpretations and assumptions featuring a wide range of characters, events, symbols, slogans and jargon" and, in short, a hybrid product, a skein of science, politics, technology, culture and religion (Latour 1993, p. 17). Consequently, it has been observed from different perspectives and from different points of view: as a cult, pseudo-religion, conspiracy clique, promoter of false prophecies, source of online disinformation, Internet scam, hate group, far-right political movement and trope of anti-Semitism, fascism, apocalypticism and threats of domestic terror (Berghel 2022).

Regarding QAnon's CTs, these are motley: "the government is controlled by Jews", "Hillary Clinton is in jail", "JFK, Jr. is still alive and will soon return to help Trump get rid of the "deep state", "COVID-19 is a hoax" and "Joe Biden's election was a scam" (Cunningham and Everton 2022, p. 8).

For the purposes of this paper, it seems clear that QAnon has developed primarily in the space of North American Christian culture and spirituality, particularly in Protestant Christianity that emphasises a charismatic leader (Dinulescu 2022; Argentino 2020). In fact, its members are religious people or belong to Christian parishes or congregations, with 27% of white evangelicals supporting and agreeing primarily with QAnon's beliefs (Zihiri et al. 2022). In recent years, moreover, his Christian followers have embraced his theories, interpreting them through religious precepts, linking CTs to Bible verses. For example, the Second Book of *Chronicles*, chapter 7 of the Old Testament, is seen by QAnon followers as a promise of divine intervention to reform American society. Not surprisingly, one of its networks of followers, OKM, is aimed at "socio-political and economic transformation through the Gospel of Jesus" (Dinulescu 2022, pp. 72–80). CTs are thus reinterpreted by QAnon through the Bible, but simultaneously also serve as a lens for interpreting the Holy Book (Argentino 2020). In this regard, several churches and Christian congregations have appropriated, through religious preaching, QAnon's CTs, amalgamated with Christian precepts.

Moreover, these preachings, which are treated as sacred scriptures and studied during religious services held on feast days, direct the members of this movement towards the emergence of new rites or even new religions of Christian origin. Thus, with QAnon, we are not only dealing with a conspiracy theory, but probably with the birth of a new religion (LaFrance 2020; Dinulescu 2022).

It is a syncretic religion, as it hybridises elements of doctrine, a "mythology" (Berghel 2022), Christian rituals and biblical verses (Beaty 2020).

3.2. Millenarian and Apocalyptic Canon Doctrines

Alongside all these religious elements, QAnon also brings together millenarian and apocalyptic doctrines[3]. Indeed, the movement has a millenarian nature (MacMillen and Rush 2022; Jones 2023), as it believes in an imminent transformation that will result in the perfection of human existence (Barkun 2013). It is possible to distinguish in QAnon two interconnected concepts of a profoundly millenarian nature that allude to a coming apocalypse: the 'Storm' and the 'Great Awakening'. The "Storm" refers to doomsday, as planned by Donald Trump, who is fighting the "deep state" clique of conspirators including liberal Hollywood actors, Democratic politicians, "evil" (Beaty 2020) and "denied" (Guénon 2021) political, social, cultural and financial (Courty 2020; Zihiri et al. 2022) elites, and even some religious leaders. All of them, from QAnon's perspective, are 'cannibalistic paedophiles' and 'Satan worshippers' who run a global child sex trafficking network and who will eventually be arrested, removed from power and executed (Robertson and Amarasingam 2022; Cunningham and Everton 2022, pp. 4, 5). The "Storm" will not only destroy the society "controlled" by the "deep state" and lead to its demise but will bring the Kingdom of God to Earth (Argentino 2020; Dinulescu 2022).

Salvation' will only come through the mediation of a divine or superhuman agent (Wessinger 1997; Jones 2023), but it will in any case lead to a reign of righteousness, to the 'Great Awakening', at which time the rest of humanity, hitherto blind and enslaved, will be able to understand the nature of evil and the corruption of the system (Cunningham and Everton 2022; Jones 2023).

4. The Critical Dimension of CTs: The Social Consequences of QAnon

4.1. Rationality and Irrationality in QAnon's Beliefs

Even if these prophecies are not fulfilled, QAnon believers keep their intense faith intact, even in the face of evidence that they have failed (Cunningham and Everton 2022). Indeed, QAnon urges its followers to look to conspiracies for clues, data or signs that confirm their prior belief and never to question them (Gallo 2019). Furthermore, their belief system urges them to stand firm against evil elites and motivates them to campaign online and take action. They see themselves as "patriots" and are proud to protect the nation (Jones 2023) and, as such, have appeared at Ex-President Trump's rallies since 2018 (Bank et al. 2018; Cunningham and Everton 2022).

Alongside this, in social networks, they often reject, emphatically and passionately, with an almost sacred zeal (Sloterdijk 2009) and with anti-social language (Sipka et al. 2022), the argument of others, generating a deep social dichotomy (Dinulescu 2022) and have even been advocating the need for violence (Huff 2022; Dinulescu 2022; Zihiri et al. 2022; Robertson and Amarasingam 2022). In this regard, they supported the assault on Congress, on the "Capitol"—the core, the head of democracy and of the nation—of the United States, on 6 January 2021 (Dinulescu 2022; Berghel 2022; Zihiri et al. 2022). Moreover, on that day, they wore clothes and carried paraphernalia, sacred and military, declaring their unconditional allegiance to "Q" and the QAnon movement.

How then to think sociologically about the possible social consequences of QAnon's actions?

Traditional sociological accounts that have focused on conspiratorial thinking regard it as essentially irrational and as a reaction to large-scale social forces. QAnon would therefore imply a form of deviant knowledge, a 'mistake', an irrational response rooted in a pathological (Locke 2009) or paranoid condition, due to the way in which these ideas are advocated (Hofstadter 1964).

Other sociological narratives, on the contrary, draw attention to the symbolic and meaningful importance of CTs. Myths, beliefs and CTs cannot be explained solely by deep emotional residues and drives but can be described through their relationship with collective beliefs (Reche and Nefes 2022). In this sense, these social scientists consider that these beliefs, despite their emptiness, give rise to convictions much stronger than those that active reasoning can produce and create a "community of meaning" (Parmigiani 2021),

a "tribal" identity (Maalouf 2004), a "tribal attachment" and, in short, "hyper-partisan tribes" (Berghel 2022), with a "societal potency", that is, with "internal and erotic force" (Maffesoli 1995).

In the same vein, some sociologists argue that CTs offer a secular and rational explanation, insofar as, for them, everything must have a cause and a rational mind (that of the Architect-conspirator) and, therefore, they have their reasons (Reche and Nefes 2022). This is not an obstacle for their supporters to consider their beliefs as true (Popper 1966) and absolute. Moreover, the explanation of evil they propose appeals both to common sense and to the secular rational discourse of the sciences (Hernáiz 2021). However, it should be noted that this is a "purification"—in the magical and religious sense—of the scientific project, since it is a type of scientific fundamentalism that attempts to eliminate the ambiguity of the world and become a manifestation of the technical-controlling capacity of the natural and the social. In this respect, as K. Popper would say, QAnon could represent the refuge of those who have abandoned God, but who have not yet embraced Science (Hernáiz 2011) and would be a sign of the transition between the closed and open society referred to at the beginning of this text.

In short, CTs are a combination of sociodicy and technodicy, that is, a full-throated defence of the technical capacities of science to overcome evil (Hernáiz 2021).

4.2. QAnon Poses a Threat to Democracy and Religious Beliefs

It seems logical, then, that in liquid, lost, chaotic, precarious, confused, relative, empty and indeterminate times, QAnon tries to exorcise these "evils" by generating solid, clarifying, ordered, absolute, clarifying, deterministic, full and truthful beliefs.

Yet, the essential question is whether QAnon really achieves its objectives and whether it fulfils the functions that its supporters attribute to it, covering the needs they pursue; this last section is what we are going to try to explain.

First of all, it must be said that QAnon is a social and cultural product of its time and, at the same time, a first-rate social producer. In fact, its truths can be considered the great lies of our time; the solidity of its prophecies is apparent, for they are not fulfilled: the apocalypse has not arrived, nor has the uncorrupt society, despite being insistently announced; they further fracture the atomised society, deeply and unjustly, and certainly not lovingly as Christianity advocates (Qinping Liu 2007), one from the other, branding those who do not think like them as "demons" and not listening respectfully to their positions; the others are imagined, moreover, as "scapegoats", a reminder of the ancestral animal sacrifice and, reified or transformed into abstract concepts, into "prejudices"; and the common institutions, the law and order they wish theoretically and patriotically to uphold are violated and unfulfilled. In addition, QAnon expresses a crisis of trust in rulers and institutions, which weakens democratic deliberation and the state's capacity to manage common affairs, and ultimately increases violent extremism (Bartlett and Miller 2010).

This is why several authors link the problem of CTs and QAnon to the political ideals and practices of advanced democracies. Moreover, they have drawn attention to the fact that they represent a real threat to democracy itself (Moore 2016, 2018), as seen during the QAnon-backed assault on Capitol Hill that put the theoretically, most solid democracy on the planet in check. QAnon, therefore, represents a symptom of the lack of trust in democracy and this is what explains its popularity (Räikkä 2009).

Democracy must therefore think seriously about the risks to it of QAnon, the social consequences of existential and democratic hollowing out, and the challenges it faces. In the latter sense, it has been pointed out that those who advocate the conspiracy are the marginalised of society, who, in turn, exclude other groups, in a passionate, absolute, authoritarian, non-dialogical and violent way: "poor" of the postmodern era (Jameson 1990), "excluded from political power" (Moore 2018, p. 3) or "losers" (Uscinski and Parent 2014). These entail those who, as Christianity does, cannot enjoy the kingdom of humans and who are promised, in life, the ascent to "heaven"; "the best life awaits us after death, and

this earthly vale of tears will be compensated in the afterlife according to our behaviour" (Köhler 2017, p. 102).

In addition to the risks for democracy, it is also worth asking whether and to what extent the conversion of QAnon into a new hybrid secular religion fulfils the traditional functions of religions in times of disenchantment. In this respect, reality shows that conspiracy myths do not provide epistemic security and do not help people to deal rationally with crisis experiences (Pickel et al. 2022). Perhaps this is because their weapons, the "dramatically simple" arguments, are insufficient to cope with an increasingly complex world. Therefore, rather than constituting a way out of the contemporary crisis, QAnon possibly further swells the critical factors of society, those that threaten the movement's believers and that are precisely at the genesis of its birth, development and expansion.

This leads us to think that the crisis, the root of their conspiratorial thinking and the expression, therefore, of their "nostalgia for the origin", leads them to focus their gaze not on a pristine lost paradise, but on a real contemporary "hell" full of risks and threats, artificially constructed and which does not end up becoming an ontological and sociological seat. Moreover, to this origin devoid of the past and close to the present is added a "passion for the end" (Cárcel 2007), dressed up as an apocalyptic destiny, also meta-socially constructed with elements of traditional religion and with violent means. Moreover, if this destiny, believed in an absolute way, never ends up being incarnated, it will most probably end up being tried and sentenced to prison as a consequence of a democratic human justice that, legitimately, must protect itself from violence.

Therefore, if in humans, in general, the old questions—substantial, metaphysical—of where we come from and where we are going, which were behind religions, have always had a difficult, perhaps impossible answer, in the case of QAnon, they become an illusion, an easy fantasy, simple and digestible, tailor-made for a consumer world that permanently stimulates desire, but never materialises, just like the advertising dream, "the dream of capitalism", a stimulus for the eternal desire, never satisfied, to buy the goods for sale (Berger 2008).

5. Final Coda

As this article has shown, in the context of the modern hollowing out of the existence of individuals and of democracy itself in which QAnon emerges, in a perverse loop, its CTs end up affecting the coherence and stability of religious belief and democracy. In fact, QAnon can be considered a relative of authoritarianism, populism and messianism, in that it reproduces, by mutating them, two of the three intimate enemies of democracy to which T. Todorov (2014) refers: populism and messianism. Of course, both thoughts, which are social and political, are mixed with a pseudo-religious sentiment or with a hybrid religiosity, marked by the contemporary crisis and converted into the point of the departure and arrival of QAnon. Yet, as we have analysed, this origin, determined by nostalgia, is too close, and this destination, conditioned by illusion, too far away. In relation to this, what is really at stake is the fate of society as a whole and not that of QAnon members, since, given the large number of its supporters, it is not a minor issue, but a cardinal one for American democratic society and, therefore, the solutions that are proposed and practised will be decisive in the future.

On the other hand, Qanon's call for violent action is an aggressive demonstration of its members' own independence, and thus represents both a *symptom* of late modern individualisation and a *protest* against it. It is thus understandable that in as much as QAnon simultaneously fulfils individual and social functions, we can consider it as a *libertarian authoritarianism* (Amlinger and Nachtwey 2022; Amlinger 2023) *and populism*, i.e., not as a solely irrational movement against society, but rather as a *side-effect of late modern societies themselves*, whose core values are self-determination and personal sovereignty. However, the movement stands for a *sick freedom*, the ultimate expression of the modern feeling of powerlessness and of a Modernity that has failed to deliver on its promises.

Finally, given the elective affinities between CTs and Sociology, if we accept that CTs constitute a social and cultural theory and a cultural phenomenon, this may offer us an opportunity to rethink, first, the ills of contemporary society and the material and spiritual challenges it faces. Then second, they allow us to reflect on the role of Sociology as an interpreter of society and as a provider of alternatives to it.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: No ethical approval is needed.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] See https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYvSwzUGlcCVTGSlvDMQZQ/videos, accessed on 20 February 2023.

[2] See https://twitter.com/macarena_olona/status/1347341468218888192?lang=es, accessed on 20 February 2023.

[3] About QAnon's many beliefs and various links can be found at https://www.mediocremonday.com/tag/q-web-made-by-dylan-louis-monroe/, accessed on 30 March 2023.

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